

Letters

Economy vs. Security

To the Editor:

Since the shock of the Japanese surprise-attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, no thoughtful American has doubted the value of an effective clandestine intelligence service to try to find out what a potential adversary of the U.S. may intend to do, not just what it is capable of doing.

The unique instrument in the U.S. Government for that work is the C.I.A.'s Directorate of Operations. Now that instrument, subject of sharp but only partly justified criticism from external sources in recent years, is gravely threatened by its own chief: Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner plans to send firing notices to 600 more veteran officers, after treating 200 officers to similar notices last Nov. 1.

Those 800 officers represent one in six in the service. In experience, the loss is much greater: All are professionals of 20 to 30 years' service. And all but a few are "good"; even Turner says that. Yet in the name of economy and a bulge in a personnel curve, Turner is hounding them out. The country may be the real victim.

Only the President or the Congress can stop the process, by persuading Turner to cancel the notices and produce a new plan for any cuts in the Operations Directorate.

What price another Pearl Harbor?

CHRISTOPHER MAY
Chevy Chase, Md., Feb. 22, 1978